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ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Letter dated 4 November 1994 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Yugoslavia addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith information on the status of women in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

I should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 97.

(Signed) Dragomir DJOKIC
Ambassador
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex

1. The Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia attaches great importance to the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in 1995. This is in line with its long-standing policy of advancement of the status of women in accordance with the obligations of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia under international instruments.

2. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia continues to pursue positive trends in the field of constitutional and legal development and in practice promotes the status of women.

3. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia guarantees absolute equality to all citizens regardless of their sex. Additionally, irrespective of their marital status, women are provided special protection at the workplace during pregnancy and the maternity period.

4. Over all, a high level of constitutional and legal protection of women has been achieved in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. While the ongoing efforts focus on translating those goals into practice, the United Nations sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia have decelerated this process.

5. In the adverse environment caused by the sanctions, in addition to children and the elderly, women are most affected. For example, in the rationalization of enterprises, they are more likely than men to lose or give up their jobs since for family reasons they are reluctant to accept retraining or a change of workplace. In the prevailing social and economic climate, it is increasingly felt that it is women who should give up jobs and stay at home with children since families are unable to afford expensive pre-school institutions. Furthermore, women more easily opt for early retirement. In this way, they feel that by staying at home they would be able to economize the family budget instead of earning extremely low wages and exposing themselves to hardships such as using poor public transportation, etc.

6. In the conditions of sanctions, the most vulnerable segments of the population in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are affected by a series of setbacks. In the case of women, there are cases of restrictive application of some rights provided for by law (e.g. maternity leave); reduced basic health-care services such as the supply of contraceptives; abortions without the use of anaesthetics; and the lack of basic hygiene items due to shortages or exorbitant prices. Statistics indicate that there is a growing number of cases of giving birth at home. For lack of gasoline, law-enforcement officers are unable to reach victims of violence in time, who are in most cases women.

7. The serious economic crisis in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is the reason that prospects for achieving gender equality in the economic, cultural and other social spheres are gloomy. The current situation of growing unemployment represents a risk of the return to patriarchal mentality. There can be no emancipation of women without a solid economic basis.

8. Therefore, in view of the current situation, the Government has adopted certain incentive measures such as free baby supplies for newborns in the amount of a monthly wage; financial support for all unemployed mothers equivalent to 20 per cent of the net minimum monthly wage; reduced price of milk for those receiving a children's allowance; financing pre-school institutions from the budget and the provision of basic foodstuffs from the State stocks.

9. In such a situation, the question can rightly be asked whether the international community, by imposing sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and persisting in their continuation, has acted contrary to its commitment contained in the preamble to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - that the "eradication of ... domination and interference in the internal affairs of States is essential to the full enjoyment of the rights of men and women".